

May 3, 1961

Mr. Robert P. Clark  
Nieman Foundation for Journalism  
Harvard University  
44 Holyoke House  
Cambridge 38, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Clark:

I am sorry there has been some delay in replying to your letter of April 18th, but I have been out of the city.

First, in reply to your question as to whether there was any conflict of interest in the members of the Committee of Consultants on Medical Research to the Subcommittee of the Department of Labor, Health, Education and Welfare of the Appropriations Committee of the U. S. Senate, I can reply very definitely to the contrary; this particular group considered the matter before them in an open and objective manner. The nature of the assignment was such that it was absolutely necessary the Committee include individuals who had wide experience in matters of medical research, otherwise many months would have been consumed in obtaining sufficient background.

I think it would have been impossible to select a group of competent advisors whose institutions were not recipients of grants from the National Institutes of Health. Such individuals would have had a very limited experience in medical research and would lack competence for the evaluation of the effectiveness of ongoing research and to propose opportunities and needs. I think we were somewhat in the position of a minister who advocates better church attendance. I admittedly am dedicated to progress in medical care, and I would resent any implication that advocating improved health for our population and those of other countries is a furtherance of self interest.

In reply to your second question asking how closely the Committee worked with the National Institutes of Health and whether most of the witnesses were N. I. H. people, I would suggest you get a list of the witnesses. They included the Director of the National Institutes of Health and his immediate assistants, the Directors of the separate Institutes, the Surgeon Generals of the three branches of the Armed Forces, the Department of Defense, representatives of the major Foundations dedicated to medical research, the American Medical Association, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and some outstanding individual scientists. The Committee did call on the staff of the National Institutes of Health as well as on the staffs of other organizations to supply necessary and pertinent data. All I can say is that my judgments were in no way affected by the Institutes' personnel. I did confer with several members of the National Institute of Mental Health to obtain specific facts, but noted no attempt on their part to influence my thinking; in fact several proposals made were quite contrary to what I knew to be the thinking of some of the Institutes' staff.

Thirdly, you ask as to my feelings as to why Congress is giving: "... generous support of medical research in recent years." This I subscribe to the splendid leadership I have noted in both the House and Senate; men with broad vision and deep human feelings who are able to blend these ideals with the recognition that saving a life and preventing chronic illness has economic advantages, as well as adding to the health, welfare and defensive posture of the country. I am not certain that "generous" is quite the correct word - I would say that "realistic" is a more appropriate term.

In recent years medical research has gained considerable momentum and needs additional support. If you had the opportunity as I have had, in capacities other than Consultant to the Senate, to visit most of the major Universities and research institutions of the country, you would have seen the meager facilities available to many of these dedicated investigators. Medical research has been a major factor in the upgrading of medical care in this country and has contributed handsomely to the advances in medical education. Medical training and

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medical research are Siamese twins.

One point you did not mention in your letter, but which our Committee considered and on which I can comment from personal local experience, and that is the question of how Federal support affects private support. The fact is that it promotes private support; it generates interest and on numerous occasions has encouraged local private philanthropy to make grants and gifts.

Please feel free to call on me if you should need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Cecil Wittson, M.D.  
Professor and Chairman  
Department of Neurology  
and Psychiatry.

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Blind copies: Senator Lister Hill

✓Mr. Boisfeuillet Jones - If this is not your correct title and address, please let me know.